

Tirath Raj Pushkar And The Sikh Gurus

By : Giani Brahma Singh, Ajmer

Tirath Raj Pushkar, the king amongst the Hindu *Tirathas* popularly known in Rajasthani dialect as *Pokharji*, meaning thereby, is a tank the most sanctified Hindu place of pilgrimage, with its history going back into antiquity.

It is situated at a distance of 13 kms from the ancient city of Ajmer, a Mecca for lakhs of Muslims this side of Arabia and housing holy *Mazar* of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti Gharib Nawaaz, the founder of Chishtya Sufi *Silsilah* in India.

Unrecorded number of rishis, yogis and hermits had been undergoing penances around here after Maharishi Vishvamitra had his *tappassaya* at this place for over a thousand years.

The holiness and glory of the *Tirath Raj* is believed to be of such a loftiness that a *Yatra* to all the four foremost *tirathas*—Badrinath in the north, Rameshwaram in the south, Jagannath Puri in the east and Dwarka in the west, is only acceptable to the heavens when the pilgrim takes a dip in Pokhar Raj Sarovar.

The flow of devotees keeps on throughout the year, yet hundreds of thousands of them congregate here on the annual *Kartika Purnima* fair, coinciding with the nativity of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh faith.

Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539 A.D.) made four "pad-yatras" of the entire contemporary civilised world for a period of a quarter of a century, covering the holy shrines of Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims in search for a formula for the eradication of the superstitious way of life of the caste-ridden Hindus and restoration of peace and sense of fraternity and religious toleration in the Mughal ruling classes. He very well succeeded in his divine endeavours when the Hindus addressed him as their *Guru* and the Muslims loved him as their *Pir*. During his second odyssey, starting from village Talwandi, now Nankana Sahib, his place of birth in Pakistan, for Rameshwaram he visited Ajmer and Pushkar Raj among other important places of Rajasthan.

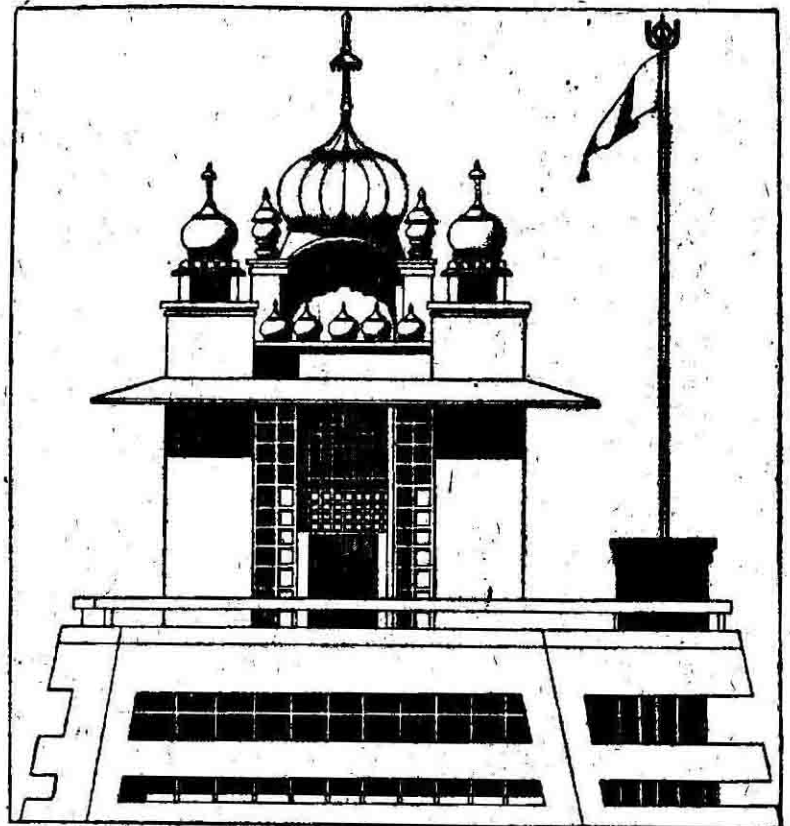
Sikh Gurus and the eminent Sufi dervishes had forged an alienable sweet togetherness betwixt them. So much so four hymns and 112 *Shalokas* or couplets of Hazrat Baba Farid-ud-din Ganje-Shakar, saint of Pakpattan, have been enshrined in the Sikh Holy Scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*. These spiritual utterances of the saint in chaste contemporaneous Multani-Punjabi dialect receive

full reverence from the Sikh community along with the *Gurbani* of their Gurus. *Guru-Bani*, numbering about 5894 hymns is spread over 1430 full pages of the sacred volume. It has 42 divine authors irrespective of the strata of birth, high or low, they are brahmin, sudra, barber, cobbler, butcher—muslim, or hindu—their spontaneous hymns being in about 13 different dialects covering a period from 12th to 17th century. Baba Farid (1173-1265 A.D.) was third in the hierarchy, second being Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhteyar Kaki of Delhi of *Chishtia Silsilah*—Order—founded in India by Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti.

Emperor Jahangir, whose birth in the household of Akbar had the blessing of a dervish named Salim Shah, attached to Ajmer Chishtia *Durgah*, visited Tirath Raj Pushkar about 15 times.

Equally, Hazrat Mian Mir, the distinguished Qadereya Sufi saint of Lahore, enjoyed the distinctive honour of laying the foundation stone of the Sikh sanctum-sanctorum—Golden Temple of Amritsar, during the pontificate of Guru Arjan Dev (1581-1606 A.D.), the fifth Guru of the Sikh religion, the builder of the holy Mandir and the compiler of the Holy Book. The Guru later suffered martyrdom under the dictate of Emperor Jahangir on May 30, 1606 A.D. in Lahore Fort under pain of severe torture for alleged creation of religious imbalance.

This indestructible link did not fade with the personal disappearance of the Gurus and the Sufi dervishes. Sikhs



The proposed Guru Gobind Singh Memorial at Pushkar Raj.

pioneered, at the international level, octo-centenary celebrations of Baba Farid's birth in 1973.

Though Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru, had no occasion to visit Tirath Raj Pushkar in person, yet almost all 52 Rajput Chiefs who were imprisoned in Gwalior Fort by Emperor Jahangir and released on Guru Sahib's insistence, holding his skirt, when he was himself a prisoner in the Fort for his alleged disloyalty to the Delhi suzerain, built their *bungas* (rest houses) around the Pushkar Sarovar, where they would encamp during their pilgrimage.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs and the founder of the *Khalsa*, visited Pushkar Raj in the month of October, 1706 to energise the

inert and deflated Rajput chiefs and to enlist their support in building up a strong front against the oppression of the bigot and intolerant Mughal rule with his 300 nascent *Khalsa* troops. Though awestricken spineless Rajput chiefs did not muster courage to offer their assistance, yet the local Brahmins and commercial residents under the leadership of learned Pandit Chetan Das, the ancestor of Pandit Madan Singh, the present incumbent of the line, congregated to pay their homage to the Guru, as his spiritual-cum-political exploits in the cause of the upliftment of Hindu Dharma and the emancipation of the Motherland from the alien thralldom travelled much in advance to his own arrival at the Tiraths.

To commemorate the superhuman and unforgettable laudable deeds of the Guru the devoted residents raised a Ghat, and named it Gobind Ghat. It is now known as Gau Ghat. Efforts are, however, afoot now to build a befitting memorial in the vicinity of the State Tourist Bungalow on the Eastern Ghat and the necessary financial assistance is enlisted from individual *Daan-Veers* and philanthropic institutions.

Tirath Raj Pushkar and Ajmer have been seats of inspiration for national integration, communal harmony and religious tolerance from centuries, as practically every pilgrim to Lord Brahma's Temple and Khwaja's *Durgah* makes it a point to visit both the places. And these holy places shall be shedding their spiritual blessings in the ages to come unaffected by any law of diminishing returns.

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